



The 40 Most Influential Christians . . . Who Shaped What We Believe Today

Daryl Aaron

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Compelling Accounts of Key People Who Have Formed Christian Belief through the Ages

All Christians' beliefs are shaped by those who went before them. Now these giants of Christian history are presented chronologically and in a format that helps readers get to know them. In addition to a biographical sketch, readers will discover each person's primary contributions to the Christian faith along with a brief quotation from their work. Students, history buffs, and curious readers will be fascinated as their faith is strengthened. Included are Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth, Carl F. H. Henry, and more.

The 40 Most Influential Christians . . . Who Shaped What We Believe Today Details

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From Reader Review The 40 Most Influential Christians . . . Who Shaped What We Believe Today for online ebook

Jalynn Patterson says

About the Book:

Compelling Accounts of Key People Who Have Formed Christian Belief through the Ages

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My Review:

Daryl Aaron has put together an awesome Theology resource whether you endeavor to be a Bible scholar, minister, or just someone who would like a more thorough understanding on the background of the Bible. The author has taken the top 40 most influential Christians that changed the face of Christianity as we know it today. With their thoughts, sermons or their publications, these individuals have come to be known as people that can completely change your thoughts on God.

Whether its Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his stance against Nazism or Jurgen Moltmann with his latest approach on Theology from the perspective of eschatology. These brilliant minds gave us so much with their minds and with their Christian walk that we will never be able to repay. Their dramatic and innate works have driven me to research more about them.

This book not only highlights the 40 most influential Christians but also the most brilliant.

****Disclosure**** This book was sent to me free of charge for my honest review from Bethany House.

Blossom says

Excellent! When the book first was available to me for review, I was somewhat hesitant to select it because to say "the 40 most" is quite specific. The concern I had was that the author, who I've not read any of his works before, would be biased and only include who he thought was beneficial. I will admit that I, after the fact, would like to have more information on the tertiary Christians that he barely mentions, such as Arius when talking about Athanasius, or Chrysostom when talking about Theodore of Mopsuestia. But I gather the reason Aaron only mentions these others are because their contributions were the result of faction, or they were deemed heretical, both of those in regards to Arius, or such as Chrysostom, the work they contributed was expounded on more fully by later Christians. Even so, these also helped solidify beliefs of Christians. Aaron's words on the title of the book:

"Regarding the title of this book...Please understand that I am not under the illusion that I have nailed the definitive top 40 list of theologians...I thought a more accurate title would be 40 of the Most Influential Christians Who Shaped What We Believe Today, in the Humble Opinion of One Particular Writer, but that seemed a little unwieldy to the publisher. Good arguments can be made that some of these should not have

made it while others should have. (pg 13)"

My thought is that the title would have been perfect if it were written hundreds of years ago! But really I think it would be better without "The". Each of the individuals in the book have indeed had quite a bit of influence on Christian belief; they were most influential, but not the most influential.

The writing style is very easy to follow, even for someone who has very little exposure to 'theology' and/or has a very basic knowledge of theology and church history {that'd be me}. I've read George Hodges' Saints and Heroes to the End of the Middle Ages and his Saints and Heroes Since the Middle Ages, which acquainted me with some of the names in Aaron's book. This book, The 40 Most Influential Christians, actually has forty-two Christians who shaped Christian beliefs. Each chapter starts with a historical setting to give context -we can see where the individual was coming from in life, where they went and who they came into contact with, through their personal life and/or writings and ideas of the time. Next it talks about contributions that were made by the individual. Finally, the author includes a conclusion- this pretty much is how the person's contributions had affected beliefs to that point. Aaron says:

"Regarding format, each chapter will be divided into three main sections with two subparts: context (theological and biographical), contribution (theological and bibliographical), and conclusion (theological and personal)...What is most important in what follows is not getting to know these great Christian thinkers better, nor is it understanding theology better (in and of itself); rather, what is most important is getting to know God better. After all, our Savior, Jesus Christ, commanded us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). There are the stories of Christians who were trying to do that and trying to help others as well. (pg 14, 15)"

I learned quite a bit of where a belief of today stemmed from and who spread it, and found it was generally because of their position, but not always. Also, there is a section titled "Brief Interlude: Meanwhile in Rome (or at least in Trent)" where we are enlightened with some beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, which to this point personally I had been fairly unaware.

Going back to the writing style: for the most part the information is presented in a no-nonsense fashion. The facts are given, the works are offered, a conclusion is made. However, occasionally Aaron inputs his own personal beliefs into this {would you really expect anything different?}, but more often he imbues the information with a little humor. Not much but it is there and I like it. I'll give you an example of both (with my own emphasis added):

"As a Protestant and evangelical, I would share these concerns; however, I also appreciate and applaud the intent of Christian mystics overall--to draw closer to God in experiential relationship. (pg 147, "Julian of Norwich, Monastic Mystic")
Scholastic theology at this time focused on the integration of theology (revelation) and philosophy (reason), so it stands to reason (no pun intended) that the thought of Aristotle would attract attention. (pg 135, "Thomas Aquinas, Angelic Doctor")"

At the back of the book are two things that I appreciate: Creeds (The Creed of Nicea & The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) & Resources, which includes both primary and secondary sources that I gather Aaron used to write this book. I love being able to read other books or articles on the subject presented in a book I am reading. He does include many footnotes throughout the book as well, which I also like.

I would definitely recommend this book for anyone interested in history of the church and Christianity. I don't imagine those who are partial to the beliefs that were considered heretical (such as Arianism) would find this to be too terribly beneficial, I still think for the sake of knowledge it would be good. I would definitely recommend it to those looking to strengthen their beliefs- whether they agree with the "Christian" beliefs of today or not. I think that going through the book sheds light on why the belief sprang up -we get a

glimpse of the brilliance -or lack of- of thought that brought it about. All glory goes to God that allows Christians to be enlightened by his word, the Bible.

One thing I would love to have seen in this book is more. More of the words of the bibliographical contributions of these Christians. More of the "why" they believed the way they did. We are only presented with enough to give us a basic foundation to move onto the next Christian who shaped the beliefs. I do think that in order to do that, though, the author would have to devote much more time and space to each person, as well as include more people. Perhaps that is just asking too much for this sort of introductory work, as I think of it. Or perhaps a book like I mention already exists and another of its kind is not necessary. Perhaps as stated in the introduction to the book, the focus would change too much by including more. Overall, it is a satisfying and good book.

***Disclaimer: I received the book for free from Bethany House publishing for the purpose of an honest review. All opinions stated are my own.

Eli Randolph says

A good survey of 40 influential Christians, and impressive if only because of the diversity of cultures, time periods, and theologies examined. However, the author's bias frequently comes out in what he defines as orthodoxy, especially regarding atonement and biblical inspiration. In addition, the final chapter (Carl F. H. Henry) was more of an apology for evangelicalism than a critical evaluation of Henry's contributions.

Jean says

Loved this book! It gave lots of insight into how some of our Christian thinking was shaped. If you are looking for in-depth detail, this is not the book for you. This is a high level look at ~40 men thru the past ~2000 years.

I liked that the author included a lot of different thinking. Not all the thinking was Christian in my opinion but that was okay. I think the intent of the author was to give not only Christian viewpoints but some viewpoints that are also on the fringe of Christianity. I also liked that the format of each chapter was able to provide some background about the times to help understand each of the thinking.

Overall, this was a book well organized and worth reading. It also provided a multitude of resources to go into more detail.

Ruth Hill says

The premise for this book is indeed amazing, and I couldn't be happier. I took theology in Bible College, and I can remember many of the theologians at least by name. So I was happy to get to read about some of these great men in history that I knew by name only. I appreciate the conciseness of each chapter, and I enjoyed some of the stories the author told about the person. It was good to see what contributions they had made.

My complaint is that this truly reads as a history textbook. While that may have been the author's purpose, I struggled through some of the technical nature of the book. I felt that it was assumed that the reader was

familiar with various tenets of theology. I will admit that I often felt lost and overwhelmed. If more personal stories had been shared about the theologians, I believe I would have felt more connected with the book.

In conclusion, if the author is only writing for the intellectuals of the Christian world, I would say that he accomplished his purpose. If, however, he wished to reach the more common Christian, this book would need to be much simpler and less comprehensive.

I was sent a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review. I was not financially compensated, and all opinions are 100 percent mine.

Keith Beasley-Topliffe says

a good survey of theology

This really is a survey of 40+ theologians from the Church Fathers to Carl FH Henry with brief bio, a look at key teachings that would shape future thought, and an evaluation of their contribution. There two women, Julian of Norwich and Rosemary Radford Ruether. The evaluations seem to be in part how well each anticipated Henry's evangelical theology. I read one a day as part of my morning devotions and suspect that trying to rush through faster would not be helpful.

Sarah says

I loved, loved, loved this book! Full review coming soon.

Mark Murray says

I think Christians is a bit of a misnomer it really should be Theologians. Additionally it really is the 42 as he sneaks in a pair of Gregory's in with Basil the Great. They were corporately known as the Cappadocians. So what does that make Charles Wesley and George Whitfield, maybe even Francis Asbury? If it really is Christians then at least for me the first big missing names are William and Catherine Booth. Also missing are some other important people like Ignatius of Loyola the founder of the Jesuits. The mystics with the exception of Julian of Norwich are missing like Saint Teresa of Ávila and her most important disciple Saint John of the Cross. The great pioneering missionaries of the 19th century are all missing. For that matter Brother Andrew and Loren Cunningham also. With almost a quarter of all confessing Christians identifying at some level with roots to Azusa Street there was no mention of William J. Seymour or Charles Parham. Dennis Bennett is missing, as is Demos Shakarian. No matter what you think about him Oral Roberts deserves to be in the list.

All-in-all the book is very good and earns the 5 Stars, hey did I mention it was free!!

Paula says

Interesting but only understood about 2/3 of it. Glad I read it but won't reread.

Heather says

This is far from a dusty annual on long dead historical figures! "The 40 Most Influential Christians" often reads like a short story, showing the heroic and the human side of these heroes of the Christian faith. Each entry is introduced with a just the facts biography followed by the author's research and thoughts. I enjoy reading Christian history so I was pleased that the information seemed fresh to me when reading about people I thought I already knew like Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I also met many amazing men for the first time. My only complaint is that of the 40 people profiled, only one woman is included. This seemed a token entry and personally I would prefer that they just made it a book simply about men rather than throw in one woman at the end. This book is an easy way for both Christians and people of other faiths to see how a life can be change after encountering Christ.

I received an ebook copy through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

G. Jorge Medina says

Learning through easy reading...

Book Review: The 40 Most Influential Christians Who Shaped What We Believe Today by Daryl Aaron

Aaron is a good writer and does a great job at distilling the kinds of things that make a person important in the grand scheme of church history. Of course, the task of choosing only 40 such representatives is in itself a burden, I'm sure. Plus, one cannot avoid the influence of one's own theological presuppositions along with a triumphalistic dependence on what some have termed, "The Historic Christian Church."

The author, of course, does not share many of my theological foundations and, therefore, makes no mention of some Christians without which my own "church history" (Pentecostal) would be different. No doubt other non-Evangelicals will share a similar feeling.

In the end, the book is an interesting and informative read. Does Aaron always succeed? No, but no one can fault him for trying to distill a lifetime into a four-page chapter. If you have five minutes to spare and would like to learn who Bonhoeffer or Arminius were, that's all it will take to get a good introduction to these men.

Disclosure: The book was received for free from Bethany House book review program. The program does not require a positive review, only an honest one.

Jared Huber says

Relatively useful book that gives short bios of some of the most impactful minds in Christianity, including their contributions to and thoughts on the faith. It offered some insightful information on many different theological elements and the people that developed them. It wasn't the most riveting read but definitely very

useful--especially to those looking to become influential Christians themselves.

Ana García says

Un libro muy interesabte, qyuda a comprender la historia del cristanismo a través de la biografías de exponentes destacados.

Shauna says

This book takes you on a brief journey through the lives and influence of 40 people important to the history of the christian faith. A chapter is devoted to each person, and that is broken down to the context (the time the lived, a little about their life, etc), their contribution and a brief conclusion summing things up.

I found this book to be quite dry. I guess I expected it to be more biographical than theological. I would have liked to know more about their lives, as well as what they believed. There really wasn't enough information about the different individuals and too much of the author's opinion on what they believed and/or preached. I can see this being a good resource for Bible School students but it didn't hold my interest.

This book has been provided courtesy of Baker Publishing Group and Graf-Martin Communications, Inc. Available at your favourite bookseller from Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group.

Bob says

Everything we teach in church today comes from our church's forefathers who have carved that path before us. And all Christians' beliefs are shaped, in one way or the other, by those who went before them. Here many of these giants of Christian history are presented chronologically & in a format that helps readers get to know them. In addition to a biographical sketch, we discover each person's primary contributions to the Christian faith (good or bad) along with a brief quotation from their work.

Now the author Dr. Aaron says that the list consists of who in his opinion are the 40 most influential Christians. He does point out that he is not necessarily a fan of the theologies of all those included, but is only noting that each is influential. He admits that a more accurate title for this book would be "40 of the Most Influential Christians Who Shaped What We Believe Today, in the Humble Opinion of One Particular Writer."

So you won't read about Charles Hodge or Benjamin Warfield, neither Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck or Herman Dooyeweerd. No Francis Schaeffer, George Whitefield or Thomas Chalmers. Most will be surprised that you won't be reading about Charles Spurgeon, Cornelius Van Til or Gordon Clark. However the book is a good read, informative & helpful, especially for those who know very little about church history (which would be most American Christians).

Each chapter (one per theologian) is divided into three parts: the biographical and theological context in which the theologian was working, his or her contribution, and a conclusion, which is Aaron's personal assessment of the theologian's life and influence.

Great book for Sunday School.
